

Water peace a step closer

There is no question that negotiations to reach a final agreement by the end of the year on allocation of water rights among competing interests in California will be complex and contentious. It also will require a level of trust between urban interests, environmentalists and so forth that is more the genetic exception than the rule.

If there is a reason for optimism, it is that the four-year-old CALFED process has gotten as far as it has. To say the state is reaching the allocation and use of 6 million acre-feet of Sacramento San Joaquin Delta water to Central is an overstatement, but only partly so.

The water 1 million acre-feet of which come to Kern County is a good example of what is at stake. \$24 billion for water rights and possible drinking water for 25 million Central and Southern California residents.

Both the amount of water to leave the Delta and how it has been allocated have changed repeatedly through play of a host of factors. At the same time, as have growth-related demands, but we have never before had such a complex and legal challenge from environmentalists.

No long-term from farm ability to a water supply picture that has fluctuated wildly from year to year for reasons other than drought, state and federal officials began the process in 1994 that has led to this week's unveiling of three possible plans.

Although it was not an entirely straightforward one, the state's water policy now is to use it actively. Anytime farmers could not, then together no water would be just the same, but the exception. While they may have occurred enough to bring parties to this point in the process, the ability to work and reason together will become vital to the next two steps of the CALFED process: a decision on alternative courses of action and development implementation plans.

The three plans differ basically in the amount of investment that has to be made in water conservation, the type and number of improvements, and the ways to improve water quality and quantity.

But those simple sounding differences carry enormous political, environmental and financial baggage. Some of it goes back to turn-of-the-century decisions which have created both great wealth and great fear among various segments of the state.

There are a half century of public resentment, period and a dozen public hearings throughout the state will have to produce enough of a consensus among agricultural, political and economic interests on which plan. If any is viable, it lies on that. One the Wilson - acting on behalf of state interests and water users.

Negotiations in bring stability to water

the state have reached a critical point

Central and Southern California, although it will be disputed that way. It has more of all the improvements in alternative water and long, with the addition of a 40-mile long, potential for improving water quality - by aggregating fresh flows from nearby Delta and salty San Francisco Bay water - and possibly by maintaining water flows. But it also carries a \$1 billion price tag.

None. It is an idea, albeit a radical one, of Peripheral (also) proposals of the Delta and 1990s. The canal had always been viewed as a "feel one" - a move by environmentally and politically powerful Southern California, with the Central Valley a silent partner. In northern California water-related areas Peripheral Canal proposals became a vehicle for political and ideological battles rather than effective ideas about how to move water.

Then, long in and of itself may not carry the day for alternative three, overcoming historic misgivings by Northern California water source reduction and environmentalists that the Open Channel Leveled Facility is the Peripheral Canal in disguise, at least as far as water users will be able.

What may be the next water issue to be made in the coming period is the allocation between developing a comprehensive allocation in which parties have to reduce from agricultural production sharply to survive - and developing a water allocation, in which everyone stands to gain with reduced new laws in the process.

Clearly, the future ability to move a great amount of water more effectively for all interests and with predictability of supply - even if no one gets what they want completely - is at stake.

With the need for complete and responsible contracts, legislation, new regulations and the likelihood of litigation to make CALFED reach its best potential in the form alternative three will take even more of a watershed effect than we have seen thus far.

Kern County represented most significantly by the Kern County Water Agency, has been and will be a major player. It will need our support, patience and forbearance during the remainder of the process.

Richard L. Lusk - 3-20-98

Post-Net Fax Note 7671		Date 3-23-98	Page 1
To	Kim Carlson	From	Monica Carter
Co/Direct	CALFED	Co.	Kim
Phone #		Phone #	
Fax #	416 654 4780	Fax #	805 634 1428